

# Seattle Light Rail Review Panel

## Meeting Notes for July 11, 2001

### Agenda Items

- Downtown Seattle Transit Tunnel/Link Alternatives
- Sound Transit Board Update and Work Program

### Commissioners Present

Rick Sundberg, Chair  
Don Royse  
Mimi Sheridan  
Matthew Kitchen  
Jay Lazerwitz  
Paul Tomita

### Staff Present

Debora Ashland, Sound Transit  
Michelle Ginder, Sound Transit  
Ron Lewis, Sound Transit  
Mike Williams, Sound Transit  
Cheryl Sizov, CityDesign  
Kathy A Dockins, CityDesign  
Marty Curry, Planning Commission

### LRRP Business

While a quorum was present, none of the commissioners at this meeting were at the last, so we will postpone approval of the 6/6 minutes until Jack and Carolyn can look them over.

Cheryl reported that the letter to the editor of the P-I had not been published, and asked the commissioners if they felt it should be circulated to our own distribution list anyway. Discussion followed as to the reason the letter was not published; Cheryl clarified that Alan Justad (DCLU Community Relations) had spoken directly with Solveig Torvik, and the decision not to print the letter was deliberate. The Commission agreed that distribution broader than our own list was necessary to avoid "preaching to the choir," and that the two most important points were: A) Link is a regional system of investments (conveying this issue is critical); and B) there is a healthy amount of detail work that really needs to be done right. Cheryl added that Alan had urged her not to give up; perhaps if an entire package were presented to the P-I, it would print something. Debora would like the letter to be sent to the ST Board, and Rick is in favor of a strong letter on what ST has presented pre-90% for the MLK Corridor. Debora suggests mid-August for that letter.

To conclude LRRP business, Cheryl went over the summer schedule. The July 18<sup>th</sup> meeting has been canceled, so the next meeting is August 1<sup>st</sup>. The MLK letter could be on the agenda, along with maintenance base street vacations. There will be no meeting on August 15<sup>th</sup>. Cheryl presented the idea of a transportation summit or retreat in September, which might be a good forum for many of these issues.

Debora asked if LRRP wants anything in particular to be presented for the Maintenance Base discussion. Rick stressed that one key point is that benefits to the city and region are greater than just Light Rail transportation. Don added that we need to be specific about what the benefit is to the public. We are not saying ST has to be lavish; it's more quality of design. Beverly Barnett should be at the next meeting.

The discussion about LRRP schedule concluded with the decision that the July 18<sup>th</sup> and August 15<sup>th</sup> meetings are cancelled for lack of agenda items, and that the transportation summit would be an excellent venue for everything just discussed. Design Commission, Landmark Board, ETC, and

Viaduct folks should all be involved. Then there was more discussion about what should be addressed at the summit; Cheryl said she would prepare a draft agenda for review.

At this point, introductions were made all around.

## **Briefing on Royal Brougham**

*Debora Ashland, Sound Transit*

As Mike Williams had not yet arrived to present DSTT/Link Alternatives, Debora began with the Royal Brougham briefing. She distributed drawings showing the current planting area around the systems cabinet compared to that proposed on November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2000. Sound Transit is nearing 100% completion. Current issues are cost, logistics, and landscaping features. The issue is that with a systems cabinet instead of systems building, there may be less need for the metal screen that had been proposed to the north of the cabinet. ST is also finding that the screen limits visibility of northbound trains. The new proposal is to eliminate the metal screen in favor of more landscaping that is less dense (so riders can see through it). Viburnum is one of the plant options; there would be a railing in front of it. The plants are more of a filter (a "green screen"), whereas the screen is a solid wall. Debora wanted to check with LRRP before they decided to eliminate the screen.

### Discussion

- There are two methods of hiding equipment: screening it, or providing something else to look at. There were trees in last fall's plan – are they gone? *(Trees don't screen as well, but could be used as accent pieces; maybe a narrow tree).*
- I'd rather see nice filtering landscaping than a metal wall.
- I agree! Make this a nice chunk of landscaping.
- Let's take the money you would have spent on the wall and put it into more trees and more landscaping.

### Recommendation

*The Panel recommends approval of the elimination of a metal screen in favor of trees and other landscaping at the Royal Brougham station.*

## **Sound Transit Board Update**

*Michelle Ginder, Sound Transit*

*Ron Lewis, Sound Transit*

*Mike Williams, Sound Transit*

Ron began with an overview of recent events. During late Winter and Spring 2000/2001, the Sound Transit Board reassessed what reasonable segment of light rail could be built, and realized that the project was unaffordable. The Inspector General issued a report, the fallout of which was the re-calibration of Scope and Schedule; looking at different scenarios for the initial minimum operating segment (MOS); and federal funding for the alignment from the U District to South Lander.

Airport Link options were developed in response to a letter signed by ten board members that suggested we begin with a focus on starting the system with a south segment. The segment common to all of the options was Convention Place Station to Henderson. It's not intended to be all light rail will ever be in Seattle, but a common piece of all southern segments. Discussion continues as there are a lot of issues relating to this, including design completion, where to

start/stop, Beacon Hill or no Beacon Hill station, and Rainier Valley litigation. The Tukwila route is also still in question. At this point, Michelle passed out a detailed decision agenda from the 6/28 Board meeting of "what needs to be resolved to complete a southern alignment" and walked through it with us.

ST will figure out how each segment will be built out before deciding to start with a North or South alignment. The Board has given staff the "go ahead" to continue conducting geo-technical borings in the Montlake cut. A decision re: North or South alignment will be made on September 27<sup>th</sup>.

The ST Board is interested in retaining the services of the Project Review Committee (PRC), who had representatives at the last ST Board meeting, but whose future role is uncertain right now. Joni is currently on vacation, but will be talking to Mayor Royer, Chair of the PRC upon her return. The Board is supportive of a South Lake Union alignment and supportive of the northern terminus not touching DSTT.

#### Discussion

- Does the Montlake boring mean that choices have been made? *(Not necessarily. Good soil samples don't mean ST will go there, but poor soil samples mean they probably won't. Interest in alternative Ship Canal crossings has been voiced.)*
- It's hard to imagine community issues would be any better or easier on Eastlake than they are on Capitol Hill – it will be a tough sell!

The update concluded with Ron saying the ST Board appreciates the support of LRRP and thanks them for the letter of June 26<sup>th</sup>.

### **Downtown Seattle Transit Tunnel/Link Alternatives**

*Ron Lewis and Mike Williams, Sound Transit staff*

Ron started the presentation in Mike's absence. The Sound Transit Board now prefers joint use of the tunnel, although their original preference was rail-only. The northern alignment can accommodate joint use to a certain point, but would lack long-term efficiency as you lose capacity after certain headways are reached. The south alignment makes joint operations more palatable. The difference in voltage (1500 for light rail vs. 750 volts for the tunnel currently) has the potential to keep the systems separate.

If the tunnel is joint use, the following has to happen: Flat-level boarding for wheelchairs, upgrade communications, and fire and life safety, emergency ventilation. Using Royal Brougham station to intercept buses/trains is a back-up plan if joint use issues can't be resolved. The key issues are what happens at Convention Place—there are several scenarios for stations or alignments there.

Mike arrived and continued the presentation. In 1998, it was determined that joint operations would be feasible, but for only two to ten years, so it would not be an efficient long-term decision. But things have changed in that ST can use DSTT for 10+ years. From 45<sup>th</sup> to S 200<sup>th</sup>, we can have trains running every four minutes and can match the speed of trains to buses in order to coordinate them. By 2004 Metro will have hybrid diesel-electric buses that will have no poles, but will generate and store battery energy while they are running on diesel, so they have no poles. The worst case scenario is that the systems would have to co-mingle, but it is possible; Metro

thinks they've found a low-tech way to deal with the voltage differences. Fire/life safety work plus intercept terminals at CPS and Lander are still being worked out.

Terminus decision is supposed to be August 8<sup>th</sup>.

#### Discussion

- Cost difference between joint and rail-only? *(Different federal regulations now than when tunnel was built, which is why emergency ventilation would have to be upgraded). Shuttle trains for just that length? (Maybe not needed) CPS is complicated by where else the rider is going (reviewed five scenarios).*
- Under any scenario, a passenger station doesn't work? *(Yes, that's pretty much true).*
- Why is ventilation a concern in the tunnel, since it's all electric? *(emergency ventilation only)*
- How is ridership affected if Royal Brougham is the terminus? *(decreases by about 1/2)*
- If ST had a choice, would it scrap joint use? *(That was the original plan; I think we can make it work. If we put more buses in the tunnel, but have to add shuttle buses to get to the tunnel, it wastes the capacity of the tunnel).*
- Lease the tunnel from Metro, or buy the tunnel and lease space to Metro if joint use.
- It's a cost problem for both agencies. Metro should pay if they carry more people.
- How/where would an eastern line tie in? *(I-90, maybe 520 – would have to be rail only. Ramps – I-90).*
- Have we learned anything about bus/rail transfers from Sounder? *(Seems to be working well.)*  
If the transfer is easy, isn't that an argument for rail-only?
- Is the IDS transfer workable? *(Yes).*
- But what about just rail in the tunnel, and transferring people to rail from elsewhere? *(The whole problem is getting people to make the transfers).*
- It seems like the transfer could be made painless. *(Yes, but mere fact of transfer discourages people.)*

The meeting adjourned at 5:30 pm.

Joni's e-mail – for additional reference if necessary.

*More Board meeting news*

I'd like to thank the Board for the focus and direction you provided staff Thursday on the Central Link light rail project. In the next 90 days we will:

- Advance the design and cost estimating, along with initiating permit applications within the "common" segment from between Convention Place Station and S. Henderson Street.
- Study South 200th Street in SeaTac as the interim southern terminus for an initial segment, which includes working with the Port of Seattle on the North Terminal station.
- Study Royal Brougham and Convention Place Station as interim northern termini for the initial segment. (This would not preclude a future Capitol Hill or South Lake Union alignment).
- Pursue the possibility of running both buses and light rail in the Downtown Seattle Transit Tunnel. If Royal Brougham becomes the northern terminus, the issue of joint operations in the tunnel is not an immediate concern. Study bus intercepts in the event the fire life safety issues related to joint operations cannot be resolved.
- Develop a conceptual route for a South Lake Union alignment.
- Incorporate the work already done on Northgate into a review of alternatives to the north.
- Complete work on the Tukwila Freeway Route. Do not pursue study of the Southcenter Route.
- Conduct geotech borings in the Montlake Cut as part of the analysis for crossing Portage Bay.